



# How to Evaluate Major International Sport Events in the Pre-Bidding Phase

**Case Finland**

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### **Abstract**

Sport event bidding and evaluating events in the pre-bidding phase is of growing importance as the competition for hosting international sport events grows. Sport event management Finland is a project that is carrying out a large multi-phased research project to map out how to carry out these evaluations and succeed in bidding for and hosting such events in Finland. The connection of previous literature to the strengths and weaknesses of Finland as a sport event host need to be discussed, in order to form an understanding of what are the key success factors in bidding.

The research is a part of said larger project and has been carried out as a qualitative interview study in order to get an understanding of international academic literature on the matter as well as expert opinions on case specific aspects that need to be taken into consideration in the pre-bidding phase of the event life cycle. The study was conducted by interviewing seven international specialists qualified in the academic research field of international and mega sport events.

The theoretical framework of the thesis includes insights into previous literature discussing different aspects of evaluating sport events, such as sport event impacts, legacy planning, image influences, tourism aspect, and local resident support.

The results indicate that Finland is an attractive host for international sport events and by consistently creating a sport event portfolio Finland and Finnish cities can benefit from hosting international sport events. The results indicate that the central point in evaluating in the bidding phase of an international sport event is to achieve a strategic fit between event organizer, host city and the event owner. The main aspects to consider when evaluating the bidding phase are the event's strategic choices, connection to community, societal effects, influences on nation or city image and tourism, environmental effects and sport development opportunities.

The study contributes to the discussion of international sport event research in the bidding phase and helps the employer to identify the aspects that should be researched to formulate a well-rounded bidding strategy. For future research, the next step could be to evaluate the actual previous bidding documents and to see how these aspects identified can be applied in practice.

### **Keywords/tags (subjects)**

Sport management – Sport events – Sport event bidding

### **Miscellaneous (Confidential information)**

None

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### **Tiivistelmä**

Urheilutapahtumien hakeminen ja tapahtuman arvioiminen hakuvaiheessa on noussut tärkeäksi tutkimuksen aiheeksi, kilpailun tapahtumien järjestämisoikeuksista kasvaessa. Urheilu Suur tapahtumat Suomessa on hanke, joka suorittaa laajamittaista tutkimusprojektia selvittääkseen, kuinka tätä hakuvaiheen arviointia tulisi tehdä onnistuneiden tapahtumahakujen ja -järjestämisen varmistamiseksi Suomessa. Aiheen aiemman tutkimuskirjallisuuden ja Suomen tapahtumajärjestämiseen liittyvien heikkouksien ja vahvuuksien yhteyttä on syytä tarkastella, jotta saadaan selkeä ymmärrys hakuvaiheen onnistumisen avaintekijöistä.

Tutkimus on osa aiemmin mainittua laajempaa tutkimusprojektia. Tutkimus on suoritettu laadullisena haastattelututkimuksena, tavoitteenaan muodostaa kuva kansainvälisestä akateemisesta kirjallisuudesta aiheesta sekä asiantuntijoiden mielipiteistä hakuvaiheen arvioinneista ja tekijöistä, jotka tulee ottaa huomioon hakua suunnitellessa. Tutkimus suoritettiin haastatteleamalla seitsemän kansainvälistä asiantuntijaa, jotka ovat meritoituneita kansainvälisten urheilun suur tapahtumien akateemisen tutkimuksen saralla.

Opinnäytetyön teoreettinen viitekehys kiteyttää aiempaa akateemista kirjallisuutta, joka käsittelee urheilutapahtumien arvioinnin eri tekijöitä, kuten urheilutapahtumien impaktia, pitkän aikavälin vaikutuksia, imagon kehitystä, vaikutuksia turismiin ja yhteiskunnan tukea.

Tulokset osoittavat, että Suomi on kilpailukykyinen järjestäjä kansainvälisille urheilutapahtumille ja johdonmukaisella tapahtumaportfolion rakentamisella, sekä Suomi että suomalaiset kaupungit voivat hyötyä kyseisten tapahtumien järjestämisestä. Tulokset viittaavat siihen, että hakuvaiheen arvioinnissa strateginen yhteensopivuus tapahtumajärjestäjän, kaupungin ja tapahtuman omistajan välillä on keskiössä. Tärkeimpiä tekijöitä, jotka tulisi ottaa huomioon hakuvaiheessa, olivat tapahtuman strategiset valinnat, yhteys ympäröivään yhteiskuntaan, sosiaaliset vaikutukset, imagon ja turismin kehitys, ympäristötekijät ja urheilun kehitys mahdollisuudet.

Tutkimus edistää keskustelua kansainvälisten urheilutapahtumien tutkimuksesta hakuvaiheessa, sekä auttaa toimeksiantajaa tunnistamaan tekijät, jotka tulisi ottaa huomioon kestävän hakustrategian muodostamiseksi. Tulevaisuudessa seuraava tutkimuskohde voisi olla aiemmat haut ja niiden hakudokumentit, sekä niiden vertaaminen tässä tunnistettuihin onnistumisen avaintekijöihin ja käytännön toteutusten kartoittaminen.

### **Avainsanat (asiasanat)**

Urheilujohtaminen – Urheilutapahtumat – Urheilutapahtuman hakeminen



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# 1 Introduction

This research is a part of a national project Sport Event Management Finland. Sport Event Management Finland is a national project that aims at defining and creating an economically sustainable and efficient model and operative unit that in the future bids for, coordinates, manages and markets international or mega sport events in Finland. The project is conducted as a collaboration between the five biggest sport event organizer cities in Finland, the Finnish sport academy foundation, Business Finland and the Ministries of Education and Culture, Economic Affairs and Employment, Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance. The Finnish Olympic committee, Paralympic committee and sport federations are also important collaborators in the project for they play a vital role in the organizing of sport events. The overall purpose of said research for the Sport Event Management Finland project is to create an economically sustainable model with which to evaluate international or mega sport events from different viewpoints before starting the bidding process, and to then choose which events to bid on. Another aim is to map out how to evaluate the success of these different areas during the whole sport event development process. Lastly Sport event Management Finland aims at creating a sport event authority of sorts that would then coordinate and oversee all the big sport events organized in Finland. (Sport Event Management Finland 2020.)

Sport Business by JAMK research unit is responsible for conducting the studies in support of this project. They are the leading sport business research provider in Finland. They have collaborated with multiple international high level research universities and institutions on development as well as research projects. Sport Business by JAMK research unit has multiple Finnish as well as international universities as their partners in addition to sport clubs, sport companies, national and international associations, governmental institutions, and the Research Institute of Olympic Sports in Finland. The first phase of the process was gaining an understanding of the current trends of sport event research and getting a clear view of the aspects that are emphasized in the different phases when researching an international or mega sport event. This dissertation is a part of this first phase of the larger research process, and the topic of this study was formulated and chosen so that it would contribute to the goals the Sport Event Management Finland project is looking to achieve. (Sport Business by JAMK 2022).

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to contribute to a better understanding of the bidding process of major international or mega sport events in Finland. The aim is to map out what aspects should be researched in order to formulate a well-rounded bidding strategy. To formulate the said strategy, measuring key performance indicators is essential for being able to manage the events and their stakeholders efficiently. For this, a few select international experts who have researched and published on various topics related to international or mega sport events, have been interviewed. This research gives insight to said international experts' views on the question of strategy formulation for the event bidding process and to how Finland is seen as a possible host for major international or mega sport events. One aim is also to gain understanding as to what are perceived as Finland's strengths and weaknesses as a possible host country, so that performance indicators and metrics to measure can be selected appropriately.

To date, several studies have investigated the pre-bidding and bidding phases of sport events in various countries and regarding a multitude of different types of events. There is no previous research conducted in Finland regarding specifically the subject of sport event bidding. This is one of the biggest aspects adding to this study's relevance and the need for it. As part of the before mentioned larger project, this research was conducted as a qualitative study where the conclusions are based on both, previous research results and data, as well as interviews conducted with international experts on the topic of Finland bidding for major international or mega sport events. Evaluating sport events, specifically in the pre-bidding phase, was selected as a topic for this research for multiple reasons. It is relevant both, to the field of study and to the project it falls under. As mentioned, sport event bidding and pre-bidding have been studied quite extensively internationally but in Finland similar research as this one cannot be found. Studies conducted in other countries that have similar starting points as Finland to hosting major sport events, can be applied up to an extent when evaluating Finland as a host country, but not completely. There is a clear gap in academic literature and lack of research, that this study will contribute into filling.

## **2 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study contains previous international research findings on the pre-bidding and bidding stages of the event. It has been built based on articles written on research that touches the planning phases of event development since this research is focused on those phases. This theoretical framework does also include some basic theories and findings from

previous research regarding other phases of the sport event life cycle, in order to get a sufficient understanding and background on the whole event process. However, even the works that examined a different phase of sport events were selected because there was a clear connection between the topic and sport event bidding and most of these articles referred to, have been found from journals such as ESQM, Journal of Sport & Tourism, Journal of Sport Management.

The articles that this theoretical framework has been built around, have been published in top journals in the sport business industry, like European Sport Management Quarterly and written by established scholars, like Donald Getz, Marika Taks, Kyriaki Kaplanidou and Holger Preuss, with years of experience in the industry. All selected articles examine the topics of sport event bidding or the pre-bidding phase from different viewpoints, such as tourism, nation image and sport development among others. This theoretical framework is narrowed down to examining the pre-bidding and bidding phases of the sport event life cycle. Some of the scholars, whose works this theoretical foundation was built on, have then later been interviewed for this study, for the purpose of further taking advantage of their experience and getting more detailed, case specific comments.

## **2.1 Sport events**

Getz (2008) divides sporting events to two types, competition and recreational. Competition events then have different categories. There are amateur and professional events but then again also spectator and participant events which can be intertwined, whereas recreational ones are defined as “sport or games for fun”. (Getz 2008). All these different types of sport events can then be divided into the five different phases introduced by Ahonen, Kreuz & Laitila (2020) and from there on the success of each phase researched and analysed. Understanding the different stages of sport events and how their life cycle develops is essential to be able to manage them. They can be divided into five event developmental phases that can all be separately researched. The data collected in all five can then be used to evaluate the success of the event and to better the process or parts of it in the future. Within all these phases, many different aspects, how those aspects were considered and how they affected the event can be evaluated. (See figure 1.) The sport event research model presented by the Sport Business by JAMK research unit is as follows:

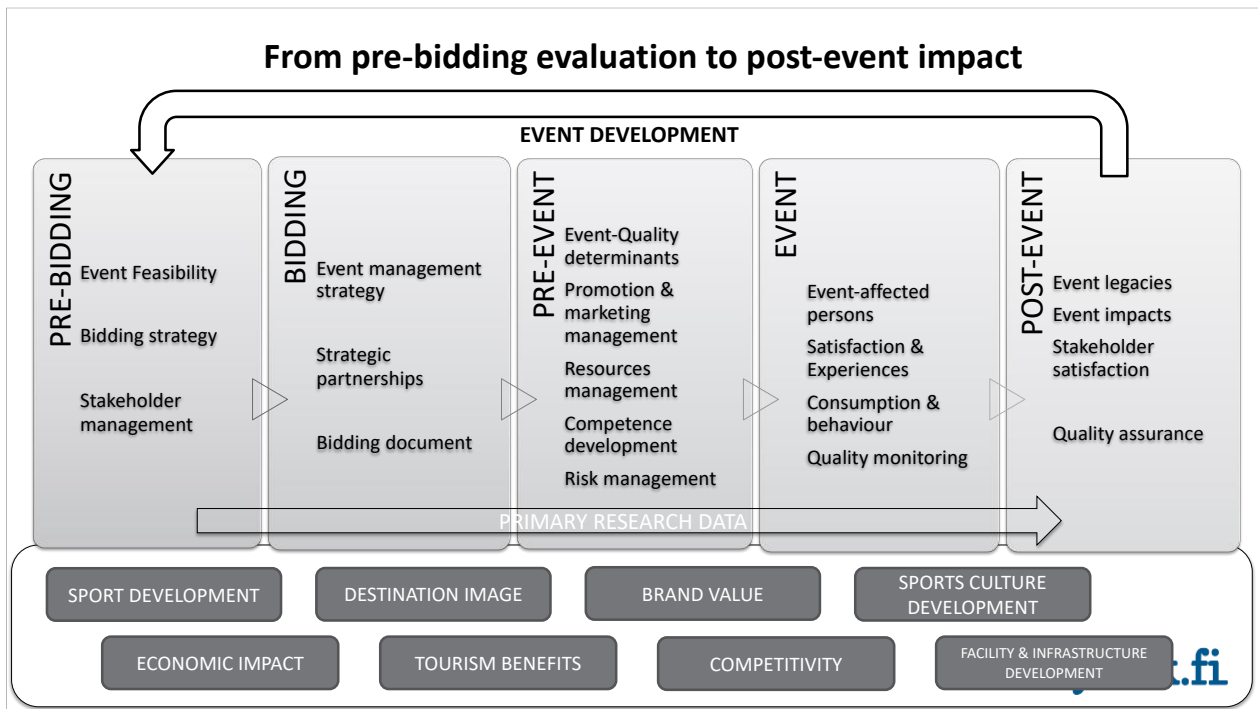


Figure 1 Sport event research model (Ahonen, Kreuz & Laitila 2020, adapted)

The pursuit for major international or mega sport events is growing with more and more locations having the resources to host them. Cities, resorts, and countries wish to host these international sport events for various reasons, such as increasing their tourism or enhancing their image (Getz 2004). To be eligible to get the rights to organize such events the organizer needs to win the bid for the event. Getz (2004) defines a bid as formally attracting or winning the rights to host a specific event. In the bidding stage of a sporting event the host city or organisation enters a long and multidimensional process that is hoped to lead to an event being granted to their city or destination (Ingerson, Turner & Westerbeek 2002). The bidding process concerning mega-events can be very expensive and time consuming, and therefore, not all nations are interested or capable of bidding sport mega-events. For smaller countries it is often more important to bid for international hallmark events or major one-time events, and plan and create an event portfolio that contains different events suitable for that particular country or city.

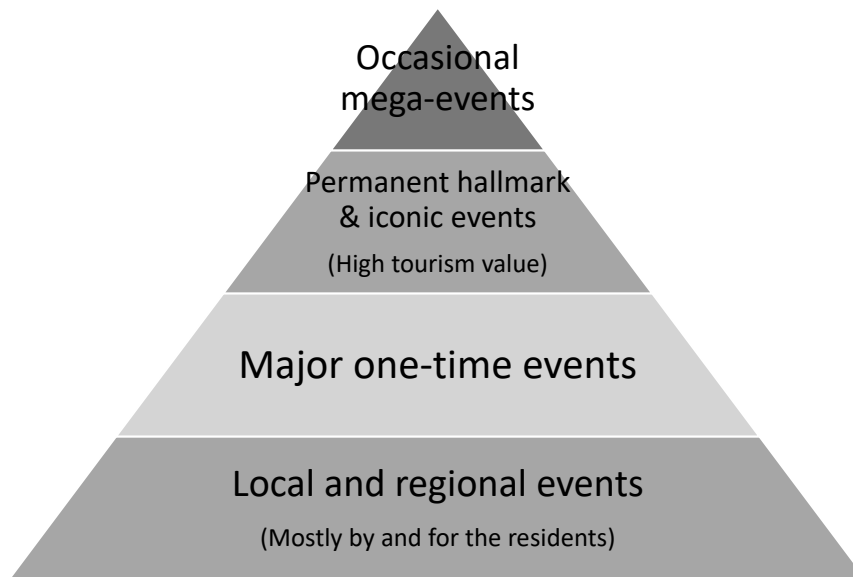


Figure 2 Sport event portfolio model (Getz 2016).

When it comes to the bidding, a portfolio approach into bidding is goal driven and value based. In this strategy, the possible measures for value are growth potential, quality, environmental value, market share, community support, image enhancement, economic benefits, appropriateness, and sustainability (Getz 2016). In said portfolio approach events can be divided into four categories, mega events, hallmark events, major one-time events and regional or local events, which all have different demand and value. According to Getz (2008) mega events are sometimes overly emphasised at the cost of a well-rounded portfolio, whereas others seek to promote one or more events to reach a hallmark status as their strategy. As the portfolio model is based on functionality, the economic, political and tourism goals can be met by effectively planning the marketing and actual hosting of the events that are in the portfolio. The portfolio model also represents how the strategies of hosting different types of events can cater to goals like sport development and community culture since the local residents are often more actively involved in those types of events and they feel they get the most benefits.

## 2.2 Impact considerations in the pre-bidding-phase

In the pre-bidding-phase it is always important to have an overall understanding of the possible impacts of the bid as well as the event itself. According to Preuss & Solberg (2006) the possible impacts can be categorised to different types that are economic, tourism or commercial, physical or environmental, social or cultural, psychological and political or administrative impacts and these categories can all have various different impacts that can be either positive or negative. Many of these same categories can actually be identified as key success criteria in attracting hallmark events (Ingerson et al. 2002) which are most likely the type of events any location could be basing their bidding strategy on.

In the pre-bidding phase of a hallmark event or other major sport event, one of the major questions should be whether or not the host location has the key success factors that enable winning the bid. Bidding just to bid is never a sustainable approach and there should be a clear possibility to succeed in it when making the decision to make the bid. The want for economic development shouldn't be emphasised too much since eight factors that are all of significant importance can be identified as key factors to win a bid (Preuss & Solberg 2006). Only if the host has at least to some degree all these key factors in place is when they should even consider making the bid.

The most used and very effective method for researching whether an event is feasible and organizing it is reasonable and profitable is a feasibility study. Stewart's (2015) definition for the concept of feasibility study is: "A feasibility study can be defined as the systematic design, collection, analysis and reporting of data and findings relevant to a specific project being considered by an organization." The feasibility study sets the event goals and objectives, intentions and activities related to facilities and different resources. It examines the availability of resources needed in hosting the event and evaluates if the event is rational to bid for. (Mallen & Adams 2017, 165-166). The impact considerations of bidding for a sport event are multifaceted and there are different aspects to study in order to make a successful bid.

### 2.3 Tourism and nation image

In many cases, little to no thought is given to the tourism potential of an event, often due to event management and tourism being thought of very separately (Getz 2008). Bidding for hallmark events in particular requires support from general public, the government and the business sector as well as technical competences, media support and infrastructure among other resources. These hallmark events then tend to attract visitors and increase tourism more than the region itself does, for their high-status image, which has led to there being an emphasis on destination or city marketing. (Ingerson et al. 2002.) To maximise the benefits of this increased number of visitors, the organisers and the host city need to understand and be able to apply theories of tourism management. The host or organizer needs to understand the goals and strategies of managing event tourism, event tourism experience for different stakeholders that stem from culture and community, outcomes and impacts on the environment and economy among other things, as well as policy and processes involved in event tourism (Getz 2008). Most importantly a sport event organizer needs to understand basic concepts of gaining competitive advantage against other event producers or possible tourism destinations. Shonk & Chelladurai (2008) define the responsibility of the organizer regarding tourism as follows: "Providing the visitor with a superior experience is based upon the event planners' ability to help coordinate or provide a bundle of high-quality services that meet or exceed the expectations of the guests visiting the city."

Especially when talking about nation image and tourists returning to the host city based on having a good experience during the event, they initially visited the city for, the importance of providing quality services is essential. The service quality can be divided into four dimensions, that can be individually assessed, which according to Shonk & Chelladurai (2008) are: access quality, accommodation quality, venue quality and contest quality. Furthermore, access quality includes destination, sport venue and hotel location, accommodation and venue qualities are formed of interactions, environment and value and contest quality includes process and product quality. Service quality aspects such as interactions or how value is created at accommodations are often not in the hands of the event organizer, but they are things that affect the impact the event creates on tourism and nation image and so they need to be taken into account in planning.

Providing quality services and managing them as well as possible alone isn't enough to create or enhance a positive nation image via a sport event. Knott, Fyall & Jones (2015) point out that branding and image are not merely a sum of planned actions and something that is intended but it

includes perceptions in the consumer's mind. These perceptions are also shaped by the culture and history of the host city or nation for example. What makes managing a nation brand or nation image challenging is that it is created by a network of both private and public sector organizations as well as residents of the destination in question and a nation brand doesn't have ownership which would allow controlling it better (Knott, Fyall & Jones 2015). The lack of control is present in other literature discussing nation image and sport events as well. Girpsrud, Nes & Olsson (2010) also introduce the fact that sport events can just as well have a negative impact on a nations image, when often in literature there is only discussion on how a nations image can be impacted for the better by these events. "The image effect of hosting a major sport event may be negative. There is no guarantee for a positive outcome, and all the risks involved are not easily controlled." The chance of possibly harming the nations image due to a badly hosted event shouldn't be disregarded in the pre-bidding and planning phase of the event life cycle. This calls for careful risk evaluation when planning on bidding.

## **2.4 Local resident support**

While hallmark events could be a building block of any portfolio approach to bidding on events, Getz (2008) argues that local and regional events shouldn't be discarded just based on their lack of tourism potential. These events complete a comprehensive portfolio since they often offer other possibilities for value such as community support or sustainability better than bigger events. While economic development is the biggest reason behind wanting to bid for events (Getz 2008) the other dimensions of what an event could offer should not be forgotten about. Hosting regional events should also be a part of a portfolio approach to events and focusing on only economically big hallmark events could cause problems with other aspects. These events don't have the same potential for tourism or the same economic scale as the bigger events (mega and hallmark) but especially with regional events the tourism aspect can be developed with some investment in it (Getz 2008). Preuss & Solberg (2006) identify eight possible types of impact, that all need to be carefully and objectively considered and made sure that the negative impacts on social and cultural aspects don't outweigh the positive economic or tourism impacts. If that is the case a regional or local event might well be a better option and get more support from the public than a hallmark event that has been considered as a possibility to bid on.

What often gets local residents to withdraw their support for a bigger event is concerns about financial debt because of large investments in facility construction and the worry on these large facilities then being empty and unused after the event (Kaplanidou 2020). On the other hand, the residents who are first reluctant to support a bid, according to Kaplanidou (2020) often change their mind because of the perceived social, psychological and political benefits. From this could be drawn, that financial factors alone are not enough to get the public behind a bid. After the economic bottom line is in order, the expected intangible benefits of hosting are the deciding factor for residents to either support or object to a bid. Sport events offer also volunteering opportunities for local residents, they have an impact on local sport clubs, and they often benefit local businesses as well. Kaplanidou (2020) also points out that especially social and psychological benefits perceived make the event experience of residents better, which then leads to them supporting future bids.

## **2.5 Economic impact and infrastructure**

According to Preuss (2007), the impacts of events in general are most often short-term, especially when talking about impacts on the economy and local businesses. Preuss (2007) also argues that economic impacts are primarily caused by consumption. However, Preuss and Solberg (2006) note that economic impacts can be long-term impacts as well, but that those longer-term impacts do not always favor the host location. They explain that a big portion of revenue often falls to international governing bodies of the event but most of the expenses to be paid, like building new infrastructure, are the responsibility of the host.

Economic impact is often determined as one of the key success factors of a sport event. Sport events are often financially supported by the government or municipality and therefore, the economic benefits for the host country or city are of great importance to decision makers. One of the main challenges in measuring the economic impacts is the lack of knowledge of the consumption patterns of different event visitors (Preuss 2007). Preuss et al. (2007) identify four different event-affected groups who enter the region due to the event, spectators, tourists and day visitors, and residents who participate the event. He also identifies the groups that might avoid the event by leaving the area of by staying away while the event takes place. These groups can be further illustrated as follows:

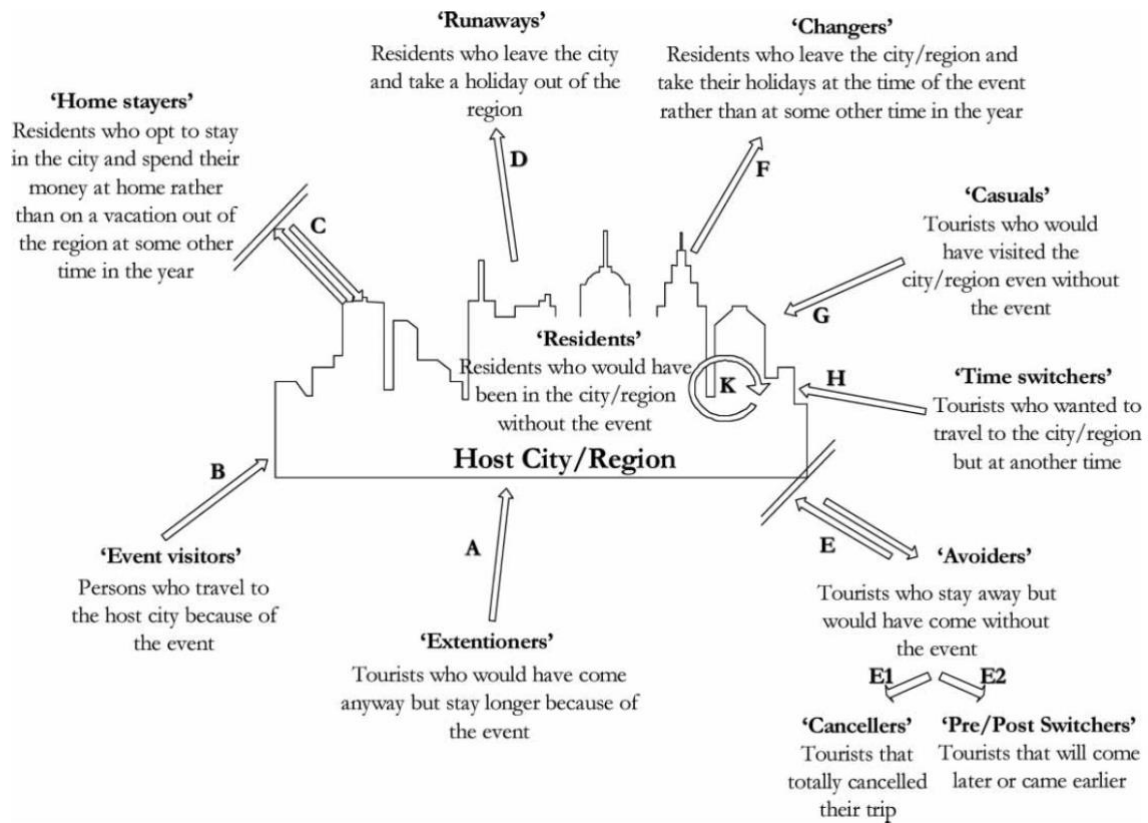


Figure 3 Movements of event-affected persons during event-time (Preuss 2007).

When calculating the economic impact of an event, the amount of different event visitors must of course be taken into account, along with the just as important crowding out effect. The crowding out effect illustrates how many people, who would otherwise stay in the host city at the time of the event, leave the city because of the event taking place. As the size of the event goes up, the effects, both negative and positive do so as well. In this case meaning the bigger the event, the bigger the possible economic impact and crowding out effect. (Ahonen et al. 2015). Taks et al. (2011) point out that small and medium size sporting events may even benefit the local economy more than mega or major international sport events since they do not require such big investments and usually use the existing infrastructure.

Investments into new infrastructure need to be carefully weighed against the expected revenue stream, as well as lost revenues due to the crowding out effect. It is important also that infrastructure that is required to host an event is compared to the city's overall urban development plan before starting a bidding process (Preuss & Solberg 2006). Even if the new infrastructure required matches the city's development plans, the economic burden from the

investments needed might make the bid unattainable. Preuss & Solberg (2006) note that in large scale sport events, the generated revenue in most cases covers operational costs, but not the investment costs that have occurred before the event has even started. It is also a possibility that not even operational costs will be covered, which could have quite a negative long-term economic impact. This as well needs to be taken into consideration when planning a bid.

## **2.6 Legacies and impacts**

Event legacy and measuring it can be a very complex concept. As a concept, event legacy is not a new idea, but it has become a prominent topic of research as well as discussion in the event planning phases only in recent decades (Leopkey, Salisbury & Tinaz 2019). The term event legacy can be defined in many ways, but Preuss (2007) gives it the following overall definition: “all planned and unplanned, positive and negative, intangible and tangible structures created by and for a sport event that remains for a longer time than the event itself”. Preuss (2007) also states that legacy should and needs to be planned beforehand as much as possible in order for a bid and the event following it to succeed and reach a desired impact. The idea of leveraging legacies of sport mega-events includes typically economic, social and environmental aspects (Grix 2014).

The process of planning an event legacy according to Preuss (2007) can be seen in figure 4 below. There are five phases in the legacy building process that all can have various effects on what the legacy of the event will come to be, and the building of any possible legacy starts with the very decision to bid. During the pre-event phase of the event the future legacy is already being built when the idea for the event and the goals of it are formed, as well as when a feasibility study is conducted, and investments required are weighed. It is imperative for event managers to understand, that decisions that are being made already in the pre-bidding stage can have huge impacts on the legacies of the event which means affecting the local communities and willingness towards hosting future events for example. It is important to remember, that a failed bid leaves behind a legacy as well and those legacies are not so different from successful bids that turn into events in the candidate city (Leopkey, Salisbury & Tinaz 2019). This underlines the importance of understanding the effects of decisions made in phase one of Preuss' (2007) model.

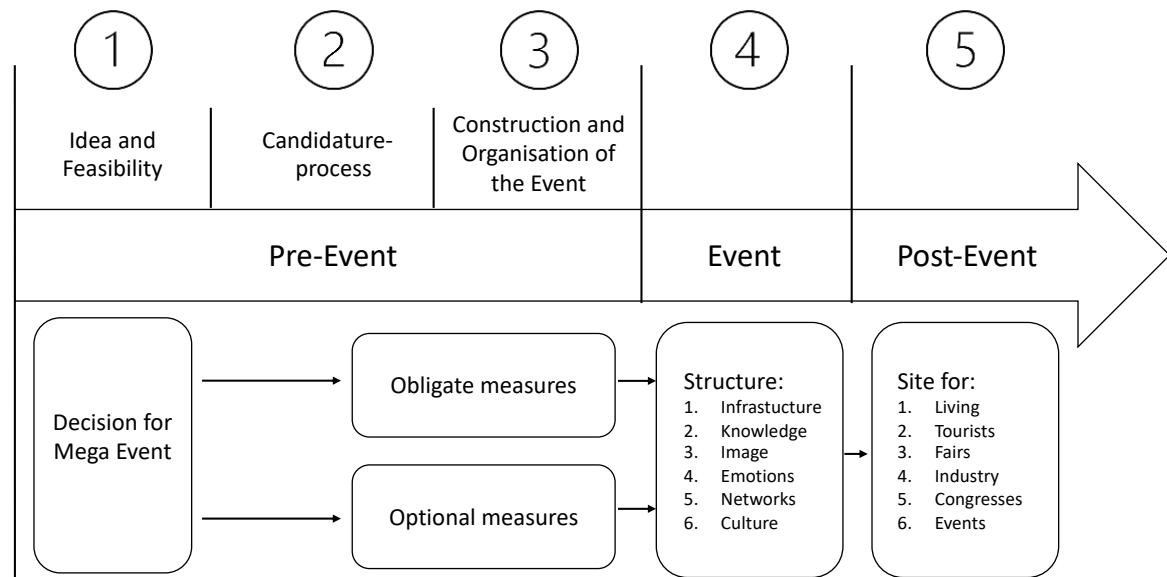


Figure 4 Process of building up planned event legacy according to Preuss (2007).

Leopkey, Salisbury & Tinaz (2019) point out that when talking about legacy it is important to remember that legacies can and will be both intangible and tangible and neither aspect can be forgotten when considering bidding. They also argue that in many bids that fail, the fact that the legacy the event leaves can be negative as well was overlooked and only possible positive outcomes were focused on excessively. Wonyoung et al. (2014) argue for the same point of intangible impacts often being overlooked and most interest being placed on the economic side of things. According to them, this seems to be a result of intangible impacts such as social effects being harder to measure and quantify. Despite the need for mapping out possible negative legacies and intangible impacts being hard to measure, Wonyoung et al. (2014) present findings that argue in favor of there still being a high demand and willingness to host and bid for large scale sport events.

Aspects of tourism legacy are related to infrastructure and service changes, such as: upgraded roads; the improved public transport system; airport upgrades etc. The new stadiums and other infrastructure can have not only functional legacies for the nation but also “iconic design legacies”, to be new landmarks. (Knott, Allen & Swart, 2012). Tourism effects can be substantial, especially

for smaller cities, and increase the tourism numbers and economic impacts in a very meaningful way when planned and managed effectively.

To summarize the literature review and its relevance to this study, it must be said that the amount of literature written of mega or international sport events is remarkable, which warranted limiting the scope of the framework. In this study only the literature found relevant to the event bidding phase has been discussed and the main aspects selected in this framework are the sport event impacts, legacy planning, image influences, tourism aspect, and local resident support. Short term impacts, long term legacy planning, community (including decision makers) and resident support form the basis for evaluating the strength of the possible bid and evaluating them builds the foundation for succeeding in bidding. In addition, influences in tourism and nation image are often important in deciding which events to bid for, since they often have a huge impact on whether or not long-term benefits can be achieved. Even though these effects are harder to measure in the bidding phase, conducting preliminary evaluations and benchmarking them is very much necessary.

### **3 Methodology and implementation of the study**

#### **3.1 Research problem and questions**

The aim for the Sport Events Finland project, that is the background project of this study, stems from the national Sport events Finland strategy where it is stated that: “There should be a model, with different metrics and suitability criteria, with which to evaluate major sport events beforehand. The impact of the event itself should be nationally comparably measurable in different strategic areas. Key metrics and impact analyses need to also be produced regularly regarding major sport events.” (Sport Event Management Finland 2020). From this framework, a specific research problem for this study was formulated.

The aim of this study was to gain deeper understanding of the characteristics affecting the bidding process of major international or mega sport events, specifically in the context of Finland. The goal was to map out what aspects should be researched in order to formulate a well-rounded bidding strategy to select the most valuable events to bid on, and how to evaluate these aspects in the most efficient way to ensure success of the bids.

The research question of this study is:

How to evaluate an international sport event at its bidding phase in Finland?

This can be further divided into following sub questions:

What are the key aspects to consider in the bidding phase?

How to select the events with most potential to succeed to bid on?

What are Finland's strengths as a sport event host?

These questions are answered by interviewing seven highly respected researchers and then analyzing the data from those interviews to present it in a meaningful way. These questions are also being answered by discussing the connection and similarities between existing literature and the results of those interviews.

### **3.2 Qualitative approach**

The nature of qualitative research is often more fluid than that of quantitative research, and so the theoretical framework can evolve as the whole process progresses. Data collection and analysis as well as writing can be happening concurrently and are not considered separate processes. It is also argued that in qualitative research the theories need to be "grounded" in empirical data and the researcher should approach the data with as few as possible pre-conceptions in mind as possible in order to be able to uncover patterns. (Veal & Darcy 2014, 254-255.) Bergin (2018) also argues that in qualitative research there is no need for a traditional process of testing one's hypothesis, but instead it is up to the researcher whether they wish to go that traditional route or treat the research as a simultaneous process where the research, writing and analyzing are all happening at the same time in no particular order. In this research it has been a clear objective to treat the whole research project as an ongoing process where the theoretical framework and analysis are constantly evolving along with the writing process, as well as attempt to develop theories from the data with as little prejudice as possible.

This is a qualitative study where seven specialists have been interviewed on their views on the research questions. The interviews have been conducted during March and April 2021 online. The aim was to form a deeper understanding of the different aspects of what should be researched in the pre-bidding phase of an event. That is why, it was chosen to conduct a qualitative study, for

the aim was to get new knowledge on the bidding phase evaluation of sport events in the context of Finland. This allows for a deeper understanding and evaluation of the topic than just a literature review would. It was chosen that the study would be conducted by interviewing international experts who are well acknowledged scholars and have published on various topics on sport events and the bidding of them for many years in their respective countries and universities. These international experts were selected as interviewees based on their research expertise on sport management and more specifically different aspects of sport event management as well as their status as respected experts among the sport management scholar community. One outcome of this research is that the international review gives a foundation to the development of Finnish sport event evaluation model that will be created later.

In qualitative research there is often a process which includes collecting data, in this study's case interviewing experts, identifying patterns and themes, and finally identifying what relationships there are between the themes (Bergin 2018, 130). In the data collecting phase of a qualitative research, large amounts of data that is specific only to a few cases is collected, for it is believed that people who have personally been involved in a particular situation are most qualified to speak on experiences and motivations for example. To get the best, most accurate results, these people should be let speak their mind without the interviewer's framework limiting them too much. (Veal & Darcy 2014, 251-252.) This has been carried out in this research, where it has been a clear goal in the interviews to let the interviewee answer questions without much lead up or guidance, in order to get genuine responses. In the analysis part of this research, clear themes have been found from the data and those themes have then been grouped together into categories based on the relationships and connections that could be identified occurring between them.

### **3.3 Data collection & analysis**

According to Bergin (2018, 131-132): "An interview is a spoken interaction between a researcher and a research participant that has a particular research purpose" and they can be used as the primary or as a secondary method in a qualitative study, depending on the research problem and previous research available on the subject. In this study, interviews were selected as the primary method of research and before the interviews were conducted, the theoretical framework was constructed based on similar research that had been done elsewhere on the matter of bidding for major international sport events and published in respected journals of sport management. The

interviews were carried out as semi-structured, in-depth interviews that had three main themes. The three main questions in the interview were regarding the most important aspects to consider when planning on bidding for major international or mega sport events, how these aspects should be researched or what type of research is usually done during the pre-bidding phase of events and what are seen as the key destination attributes of a host city and how is Finland seen in relation to them.

Conducting a semi-structured interview means, that there are some set themes or questions that need to be covered during the interview but are not too defined, to allow a deeper exploration of the topics (Bergin 2018, 132). According to Kananen (2008, 73), in an in-depth interview these pre-defined themes will be given to the interviewee in advance, in order for them to be able to prepare to some degree. These themes are then covered with the interviewee and the purpose of the preparation is to make sure all aspects of the phenomenon are included. In-depth interviews are a good choice for a qualitative study for they give the interviewee openness and range but also offer the possibility to limit the discussion with the framework of the themes. Another reason in-depth interviews are a good choice is that they provide rich knowledge from a small, limited number of sources which is wanted in qualitative research. These characteristics of in-depth interviews give it the unique quality of offering specific knowledge and views to a phenomenon. (Kananen 2008, 73-75).

The interviews for this study were conducted during spring of 2021, remotely via Zoom, due to the still ongoing pandemic and for that most of the interviewees lived in locations that would have been time consuming and costly to arrange visits in. The interviews were recorded, with the interviewees' permission, and then turned into transcripts. All interviews were between forty minutes and one hour in length and the names of the interviewees were agreed to be kept anonymous. The starting point for the interviews and formulating the interview questions was to gain an understanding of how one should evaluate international sport events in the pre-bidding phase, within the context of Finland. The main interview questions, that were formed based on the research problem and key concepts identified in the theoretical framework, were as follows:

1. What are the most important aspects that need to be taken into account when planning on bidding for major international or mega sport events?

2. What kind of research is usually conducted on pre-bidding processes of events and what do you consider relevant to be researched?
3. What do you see as the key destination attributes of a host city? How do you see Finland as a host country for big international or mega sport events?

These questions were given to the interviewees in advance, in order for them to get an overview of what would be discussed. Depending on the interview's development and the interviewees' answers, follow up questions were asked if deemed necessary. The follow up questions, that were asked for the purpose of getting more precise and detailed answers, were about how the aspects the interviewee mentioned should be researched in their opinion, which stakeholders should be researched and what are perceived as Finland's strengths and weaknesses as a bidder and as a host, for example. The direct question of "What kind of events do you think, in your professional opinion, should Finland be bidding for?" was also asked every interviewee at the end of the interview.

The interview data has been coded and categorized using Microsoft Excel in order to analyze it and present the results in a meaningful way. Coding is a process where one applies labels to the data, in this study's case the interview transcript text, to identify themes from the data (Bergin 2018). This helps the researcher see which details to explore further and which parts are irrelevant in regard to the research problem. In a qualitative study it is also important to remember that even if a theme was to just appear once it can be just as valid as the recurring ones (Veal & Darcy 2014, 430-431). In this study the coding has been based on themes that emerged from the data. After making transcripts of the interview recordings, the themes were identified by sorting the data into an excel spreadsheet, first according to themes that could be identified from the theoretical framework and then as the coding process went further new themes were identified from the data itself and those were added to the same table. There are themes that could be identified from the interviews, that have been identified as recurring in the theoretical framework as well, while some are case specific. As there has not been much research on the topic in Finland yet, it was to be expected that there would be themes and results that cannot be identified from previous literature, that are specific to the Finnish context.

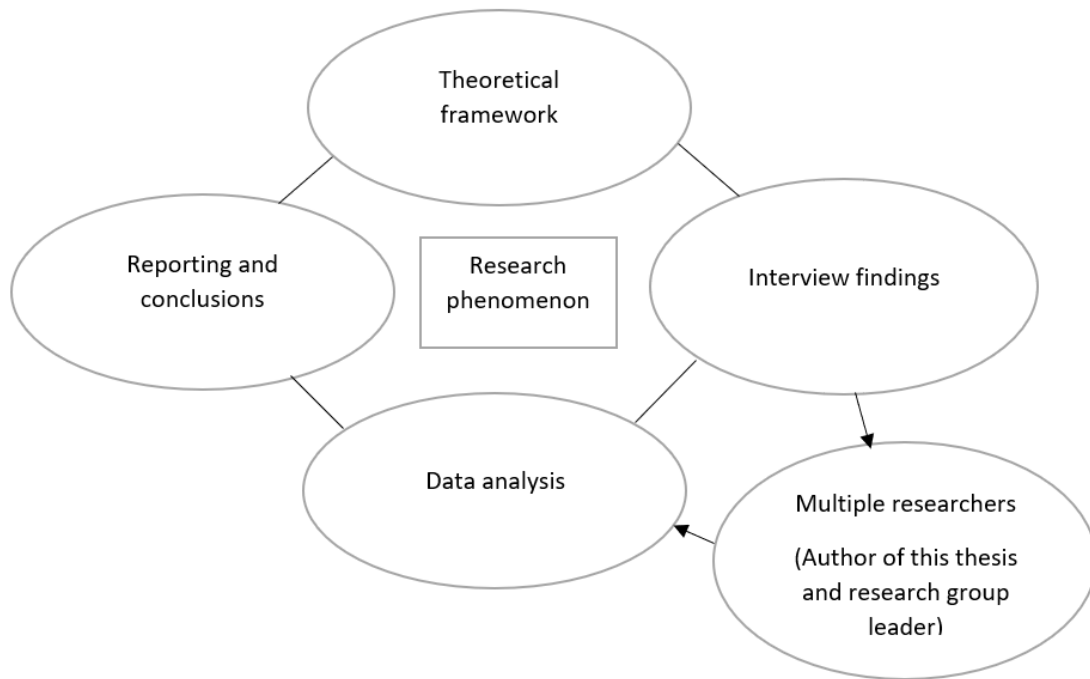


Figure 5 Researcher triangulation of this study

Triangulation, according to Flick (2014, 182-192), can promote the quality of the research as well as produce knowledge that could not be reached if only one approach was used. He argues that using triangulation can also be very rewarding when conducting qualitative research. In this study, triangulation meant the author carrying out and processing the literature review, interview findings, data analysis and reporting, but that in analyzing the interview findings the head researcher of the larger ongoing project was involved as well. The use of triangulation was justified, as the research was focused on the various different aspects influencing the bidding phase of sport events and the study had multiple theoretical perspectives. By using researcher triangulation, the aim was firstly to promote the trustworthiness and improve the quality of the study but also to achieve a deeper, holistic understanding of the phenomenon in question. Stake (2010, 123-124) defines triangulation as an additional tool for identifying if the meaning is correct or is there still a need to further discuss some differences or clarify details.

As stated, even though this qualitative research is an independent study, however it will be utilized as a part of a larger multi-phased research that is underway by Sport Event Management Finland and Sport Business by JAMK research Unit. The results of this thesis research have been presented to the project group of Sport Event Management Finland in an online workshop,

together with a separate study serving the same larger research needs, that has been carried out by Sport Business by JAMK research unit. How the bigger research project has been planned and implemented so far, as well as stakeholders related to it, can be seen in below in figure 6. In the figure, this thesis research is marked as “Interviews of international experts” and the report from it.

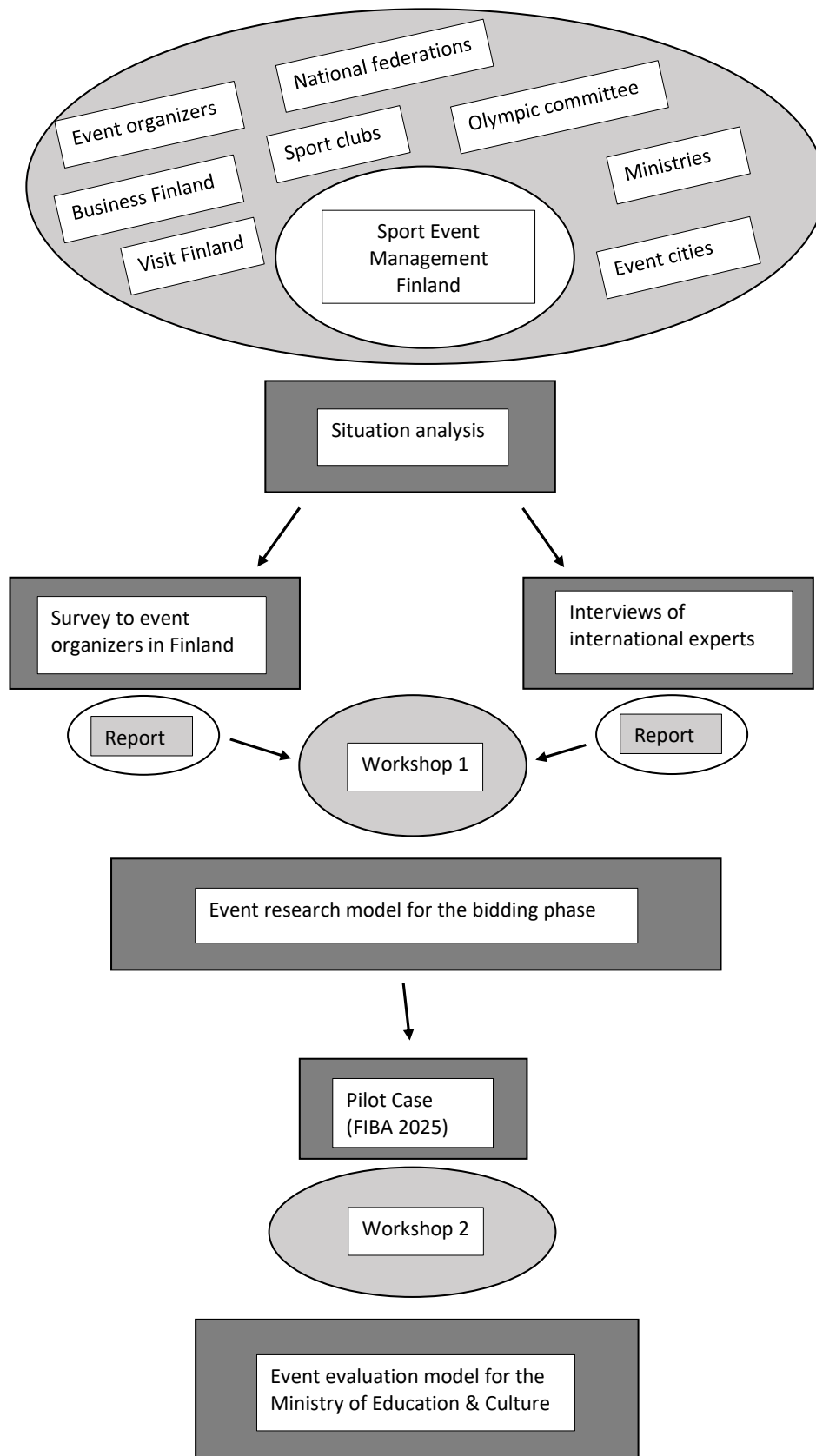


Figure 6 Event evaluation model research plan (Ahonen 2021, adapted).

In all research, reviewing the quality of the process and data is crucial in order to present meaningful and applicable results. When talking about qualitative research, Veal & Darcy (2014, 50) argue that trustworthiness and authenticity are often more suitable criteria for assessing the quality of research, than validity and reliability. They present trustworthiness to have four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In this research trustworthiness has been ensured by reporting the process and results in as much detail as possible. Veal & Darcy (2014, 267-268) also point out that the results of qualitative research can never be universally applicable, but they can be applicable to a wider context than the one researched. Due to this nature of qualitative approach, there are not specific tests to determine the trustworthiness of a study, but the issue can and should be discussed to determine some form of assessment of trustworthiness.

## **4 Results**

After conducting the interviews and coding and analyzing the gathered data, thirteen clear and prominent themes could be identified. These thirteen themes have then been divided into six categories based on how the interviewees linked them together and how much emphasis were put on the importance of each theme or aspect. All the themes and how they have been grouped together can be seen in figure 7 below. Each category of themes will be discussed in greater detail, and every one of them were deemed important by more than one of the interviewees, but three were emphasized by almost all, the overall strategic fit, goals of the event and mutual benefit with the event owner. These three themes were one's that were considered the bottom line by the interviewed experts, to an extent that if these aspects weren't in order, there was no point in even entertaining the idea of bidding.

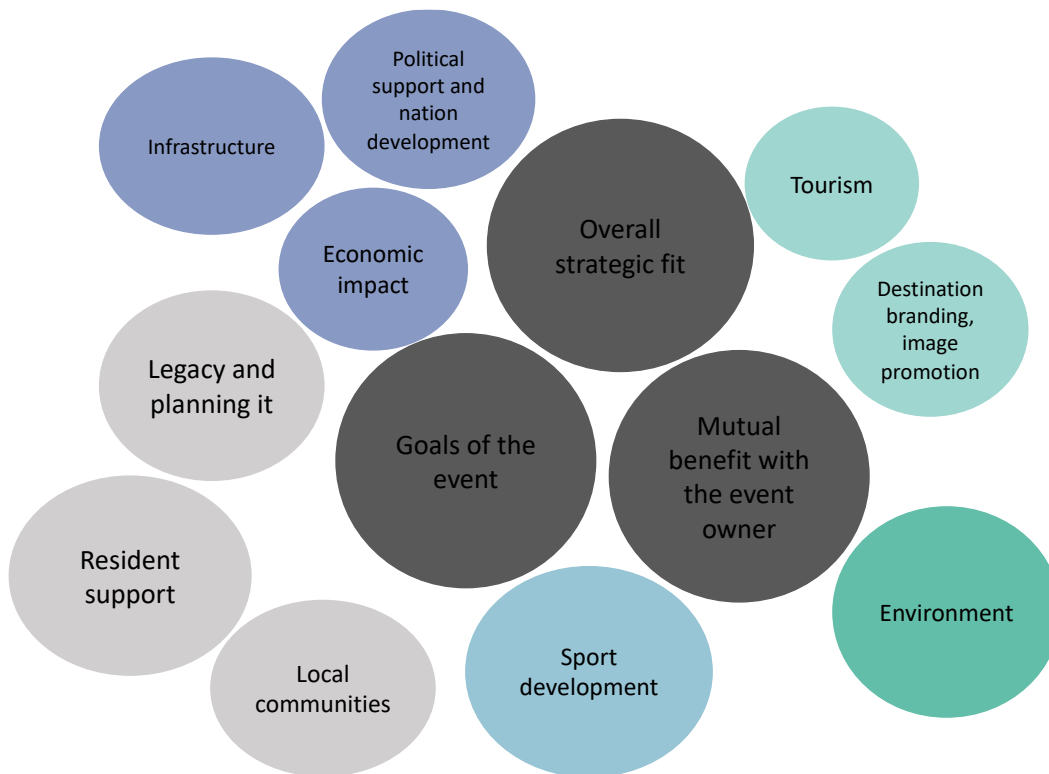


Figure 7 Aspects to consider in the pre-bidding phase inquiries and evaluation of a sport event.

#### 4.1 Strategic choices

If one aspect was to be labeled as the most important one to consider according to the interviewed experts, in the pre-bidding phase of a sport event, it would be overall strategic fit. It came up in all the interviews, it was seen as an essential if not the most important part of the pre-bidding considerations. If the overall strategic fit between the event itself, the right owner (often the international federation) and the country's and host city's strategies is not there, there shouldn't be a bid to begin with. Eventually, all the aspects to consider and research before bidding come down to strategic fit. After all the considerations and inquiries there either is or is not a strategic fit between the event owner's goals and the prospective host city's goals for the event. The event owner in most cases has very clearly defined goals for the event, which can be found in the bidding documents and guidelines. The prospective host city needs to also have clearly defined goals for the event and how the potential the event brings will be utilized.

As overall strategic fit is formulated and sought out, the size of the event is an important factor. The scale needs be right and aligned with the goals for the event, for both the event owner and

the host. Equally important is formulating the bidding strategy together with the main stakeholders and having a strong base in critical evaluation of possible different economic, social and ecological impacts the event would cause. Interviewee 2 emphasized the fact that having a bigger event doesn't always mean getting better benefits and returns: "There's a lot of benefits that you can get from smaller events as well. It just needs to be the right scale. If it's too big it's hard to have it be so successful."

Planning and implementing a portfolio strategy was seen as a key factor by most of the interviewees. It was emphasized by many of them that bidding just for one event for one reason is never a sustainable approach. As Finland is a smaller country, bidding for a mega event like the Olympics might not be the right choice, and the strategic fit aligned with the goals for the event might be better with a one-time major event or a hallmark event. There needs to be a justification for each bid, why that event would benefit the overall goals of the host city or organization as well as a plan of how it fits with other events happening in the country or region. Interviewee 1 said there are certain questions the organizers need to ask themselves before starting a bidding process: "Why do you even want to do that? Specific goal in mind when bidding the event. Why do you want to do the bidding? What is the idea behind the bid? Is the country strategy in connection to the bid? Why would we host this event?" Having a clear reasoning behind bidding was seen as the starting point for any successful and meaningful bid, not just another aspect among others to consider. The main reasons behind bidding do not need to be any one thing, they can be political, tourism or social reasons, but they need to be defined and transparently communicated.

## **4.2 Connection to community**

Especially when talking about major and mega-events, resident support was stressed by multiple interviewees as a factor that could tank a bid in a smaller country like Finland. In order for the residents to give their support to a bid and an event, they need to see the benefits of hosting. It was also mentioned in the interviews that Finland being a very democratic society, the support of the general public was seen as playing an even bigger role than in a country where the political situation isn't quite as equality driven. According to the interviewees, the best way to conduct inquiries on potential support or lack thereof from the local residents would be to conduct opinion polls and surveys on willingness to host the event that is being considered. These surveys should

take place primarily in the host city, but also in a larger surrounding area if the results from the host city itself are positive.

Local communities are the support system of a large-scale sport event, but they are also the ones most affected by both the positive and negative impacts of the event. The social impact to the society that is hosting, needs to be carefully considered already in the pre-bidding phase, and these benefits to the residents and society need to be communicated well to get this support system to stand behind the event that is being planned. The interviewed experts mentioned, that quite many bids have fallen through because of lack of residents, fans and spectators committing to the event already in the bidding phase. Interviewee 1 described the importance of resident support as such: "Finland is fairly small from a population standpoint, that that matters because the economic engine of the country has a certain power to weather the storm from a financial and budgetary standpoint. I think that that's important, the resident's willingness to be part of that process and support the endeavor is critical to survive. Feelings of residents directly affect the image of the event." They also continued, that stakeholders outside the sport sector need to be standing behind the bid and the event, again especially considering the size of Finland from a population standpoint.

Legacy and planning it came up as a topic of discussion in multiple interviews. The long-term effects on society and environment are something that has been a growing focus of international federations and other event owners. What happens to the facilities and infrastructure that is invested in because of the event was seen as something crucial to consider. The local communities are in a key role in this aspect as well, and these new facilities should not be built if there is not a plan as to how the local residents can utilize them in the future. Sustainability is of course always linked to building new infrastructure and securing that there is a high utilization rate in order to avoid having big, empty, decaying stadiums as the legacy of the event. Researching and planning the legacy of an event before even bidding was seen as a major step in pre-bidding preparations and the interviewees recommended that it be done by utilizing research on the legacies of previous similar events as well as mapping out long-term impacts on economic factors like infrastructure as well as social aspects.

### 4.3 Societal effects

In addition to needing the support of residents, especially in a small country, political support for a large-scale sport event is needed in any country according to the interviewees. The bigger the event, the more the amount of political support is a deciding factor in whether a bid is successful. There needs to be political support within the host country and city to secure the needed public funding for investments for example, but there is an equal need for international lobbying. The interviewees saw that having people inside the international federation that is granting the rights to host the event is key and sometimes the thing that getting an event comes down to.

When looking for political support for an event, nation development is something that according to the interviewed experts is brought up. They warned about having too much of a populist approach when it comes to this but remembering that the event needs to be evaluated based on facts and whether it fits strategically in the nations plan and not poll numbers on an upcoming election. One of those facts being the economic impact of the event. Economic impact is often the easiest to evaluate, according to the interviewees but it cannot be overlooked because of its perceived easiness.

Infrastructure plays a big role in society and the infrastructure that is needed for sport events is sometimes a very clear factor that divides locations into one's that could or could not host specific events. It also is one of the factors that needs to be taken into account when the economic bottom line is evaluated. Is there enough infrastructure already or is there enough money to invest in new facilities or accommodation and transportation solutions, so that the event can be hosted and the capacity of visitors accommodated, is a question that needs to be one of the first that gets answered when considering starting a bidding process.

When talking about researching and evaluating the societal effects of events in the pre-bidding phase, the interviewees all had similar views. Feasibility studies were seen as the logical starting point to all inquiries. If the event wouldn't be feasible, why even reach for it and spend money and other resources on bidding for it in the first place. Cost-benefit analyses were seen as a necessary step in evaluating the need for new infrastructure as well as having a long-term plan for said infrastructure and evaluating how that would play out. The economic impact evaluations were

seen as important not only for the host city or host organizations, but also for local businesses and other stakeholders.

#### **4.4 Nation image and tourism impacts**

When talking about tourism and nation image effects of international events during the interviews, one theme that came up many times was that there is no room for romanticizing. While promoting the country is a big aspect with major events, the economic bottom line needs to be carefully considered without getting caught up in romantic thinking. This has happened in many cases in the past with bids around the world, which has in most cases led to the bid failing or to financial struggles later in the event process.

Nation image impacts can be the desired and planned impacts but also something entirely different. It is important to plan, what kind of media attention Finland as a nation wants as a result of a sport event. The image and brand of Finland as a product of an event is not only formed in the minds of those who actually visit Finland, but also those who follow the event via different forms of media. The interviewees stressed that planning media content and coverage together with broadcasters and creators needs to be a part of the planning from day one. It was also noted by Interviewee 6, that while a good image could be promoted through good media planning, the lack thereof could result not just in not getting the desired results but the image taking a huge hit: "Media could get people against the event, the scrutiny of things promised needing to stand up against closer evaluation is heightened." This also begs the question of defining what kind of a brand the country wants to set forth and does the event fit within that brand. It is also important to remember that the event owner will have their own branding and image goals for their event and if these do not align with the image goals of the host, the event might not be the right fit.

For there to be lasting, long-term tourism impacts due to a sport event, there needs to be something more than just the event that is offered to tourists coming to Finland. Even if the tourists are here firstly because of the event, they come back and recommend Finland as a location to other because of everything but the event. Therefore, the interviewees saw that it is important to map out the special features that Finland as a destination has to offer and to regard to the tourism industry as both a beneficiary and a producer of side events or products that support the main event. This also goes together with planning media coverage; the tourism

industry needs to be a part of this planning in order for there to be positive long-term tourism impacts.

#### **4.5 Environmental effects and sport development**

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on environmental effects in the bidding criteria for major sport events, according to multiple interviewees. There is a transition of sorts to a more environmentally sustainable way of life and governance in all areas of life, and sport is no exception to this.

Sport development does not necessarily have any other connection to environmental effects, than that it is much like it a very individual factor in relation to other aspects like economic impact or tourism. It is also something that in a small country like Finland, according to the international experts, could and should be a deciding factor when it comes to the decision to bid. The resources of sport federations and clubs, who would essentially be taking on a big part of the organizing responsibility if Finland were to host an international event, are limited. Small population means less participants in a specific sport, which in turn means less resources to organize events than the same sport's federation might have in a larger country. Because of this, the federation and clubs in question would need to be very committed to the event and getting them committed requires evaluating and communicating the benefits, as well as drawbacks, this event would have to the sport very effectively.

The status of an event as a development factor to the sport in question often does not come from an increase in participant numbers. It was noted by the experts that hoping that a professional sport event would increase participant numbers in the sport the event features is naïve and most likely not going to happen. More than one of them made the notion that there have been multiple studies showing that these events do not inspire those people to do sports who have no interest in sports to begin with. However international events can contribute to a sport's development in a meaningful way if the potential is correctly identified and utilized accordingly. In many cases, youth level events and smaller elite level events can have a bigger impact on the development of a sport in a specific country or city, than mega events, according to the interviewees.

The experts also stressed that examining the support of the sporting community and evaluating what the event's effects on the sport would be is needed and that newer up and coming sports shouldn't be disregarded when deciding what events would best fit in Finland's event portfolio. These sports often have more potential in sport development than the "safe" familiar sports do.

#### **4.6 Finland as a host destination**

Every interviewee was asked to evaluate what they considered to be the strengths of Finland in comparison to what are seen as key attributes of a good host city, based on their personal knowledge, experiences and image of Finland. As to what the interviewees considered to be the key criteria for a good host, they discussed very similar topics as above, when asked about what needs to be evaluated before bidding. Existing infrastructure, regarding both tourism and sport facilities, was seen as a key criterion with international federations focusing increasingly on sustainability and legacy planning. Another aspect that already came up in further parts of the interviews and again after this question was having the support of all involved stakeholders, not just the specific sport community's support was seen as enough.

However, the experts also talked about some other aspects and criteria the event owners often look for when picking a host city or country. These included things such as having a unique image in order to attract spectators, the country's image as a sport-oriented nation, number of fans that the sport in question has in the country, having a sport development and sport event strategy and they put a special emphasis on sustainability of logistics and accessibility and environmental sustainability planning of the event. The interviewees also emphasized the importance of overall safety as well as security planning of the event as a key criterion for a host nation. In this department all the interviewees praised Finland's image as a very safe destination for both event tourists and athletes.

The perceived strengths of Finland, regarding technical skills and organizing abilities were advanced technological solutions, international orientation as a nation, history as a very successful host for international events, perfect climate for some sports that cannot be organized unless there is snow and quality infrastructure. Finland was especially known for having hosted successful athletics championships events among the interviewees. Other sports that were mentioned as associated with Finland as an event host were multiple winter sports such as cross-country skiing

and ice hockey, rally and extreme sports in general and one of the interviewees suggested that Finland could be seen as a very lucrative golf destination.

Image and tourism potential wise the interviewed experts praised Finland for having a stellar reputation for investing in the development of youth sports and providing sporting opportunities for all. They also mentioned that what makes Finland a good destination for tourist is everybody's basic ability to speak English as well as the unique nature and the image of loving and taking care of that nature. Finland's image as a sustainability and environmental consideration forerunner was also mentioned as something that should be utilized more as a strength.

There were also some challenges that came up in the interviews that Finland would need to solve or work around to win bids. The small size of the country and the limited number of venues and capacity to host visitors was seen as an obvious challenge when it comes to mega-events in particular. An event like Olympics might be possible for Finland if hosted together with another country nearby, but that would possibly require building new transportation solutions. The experts also saw the fact that Finland is not investing as much in elite and top sports as many other contenders for the event hosting rights as something that would require explaining and careful planning as to why Finland should be given a certain event to host if the investments to the sport in question aren't a priority.

## **5 Conclusions and discussion**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

As has been established, a portfolio approach could easily be seen as a competitive option for Finland's bidding strategy since we do not necessarily have the resources to hold a mega event like the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup. Mega events leave a bigger impact on the location that hosts them, but they also require a lot of infrastructure, such as sports facilities, logistics and accommodation, that Finland does not necessarily have in such quantities as well as more monetary and human resources. Whereas hallmark events still have a considerable impact while remaining in a scale that Finland could handle with the existing resources. Finland also does not even necessarily have the need for such a number of facilities, or enough people to use all of them after the event.

Also, important to understand is, that in Finland's case the support of the residents could make all the difference in whether a location chooses to go through with a bid or not. Being a relatively small country, when it comes to the number of residents, the support of the public or the lack thereof could either make or totally break a bid. Since, for example, many of the facilities in Finland are owned and governed by the public sector, not knowing where the public opinions lie in the pre-bidding phase and then later getting pressure from the local residents who don't want to host the event could cause serious issues in the organising phase of the event.

In Finland as the residents close to unanimous support would play possibly an even bigger role than in a larger nation, tools like opinion polls and even understanding what influences the public opinion, could be critical in evaluating what events to bid on. Firstly, understanding the possible impacts of a bid and hosting an event and the correlation between those and being able to attract events and then being able to measure how the public perceives those impacts are critical steps in the process of deciding what events to bid on.

While the need for understanding the concepts and key factors of event tourism can be applied to any host and any event, especially if Finland were to bid for a hallmark event the organiser would need to have a clear strategy and understanding of the tourism aspect of the event. Finland is a small country with not so many residents at a single location or its surrounding areas, so the tourist numbers would be needed to make the event profitable. Finland as a destination by itself is also not traditionally a big tourism attraction, which is why the event would need to be bringing in the tourists. Getz (2008) argues that there are tourists who go to events because they are already in the area and tourists who came to the area because of the event. Finland as a host for a major sport event would need to attract the second type of tourists since there are not many of the first type.

When planning on bidding for sport events, economic benefits are clearly major driving factor in the decision of making the bid, but event tourism factors and local resident support are not to be forgotten in the decision-making process. While the monetary aspect and with it the ability to host the event in the first place, is the basis for any bid succeeding (Ingerson, Turner & Westerbeek 2002) and in cases like Doha World Athletics Championships monetary resources or public support weren't limiting factors, locations like Finland require the event to attract tourists in order to be

sustainable and successful as well as the support of the local residents as much as monetary resources in order for the bidding and organising of the event to be possible. The functionality and value-based portfolio approach could easily be seen as a more competitive option for a country like Finland as their event bidding strategy since the development of sporting and leisure culture has long been a characteristic of its overall strategy.

It is important that the sport event managers are familiar with all the different phases of the planning and organizing process of sport events. Pre-bidding and bidding being the first phases of the event process it is important that the manager understand the possible impacts of the event and how to do the background research to make sure the event has the potential to succeed. As all these phases (pre-event, event and post event) need to be effectively managed it is often forgotten that the pre-event phase requires skilled management as well as the latter phases. It is not a sustainable strategy to bid first and then start figuring out how and why host this specific event and this is what a skilled sport event manager understands. When all the key aspects that are required to succeed in the bidding and be granted the event or all the functional or value creation aspects aren't looked into closely enough before making the decision to bid the organisation or host could end up losing money, time and other valuable resources. They could just as well endure possible image damage, lose tourism revenue, or lose the local community's support for future events if the pre-bidding and bidding phases aren't managed effectively, and poor decisions are made.

All of this finally comes down to strategic choices made in the pre-bidding and planning phase of the event life cycle, to the strategic fit. A model for aiming at strategic fit, that has been formulated based on the primary results of this study, according to Ahonen & Backman (2021) can be seen in figure 8. Picking a fitting size event and formulating the bidding strategy together with the stakeholders' expectations and eventually reaching a strategic fit that figure 8 illustrates, requires two-way communication between all major parties (host city, country and international federation). Achieving strategic fit takes careful coordinated planning open communication between all the stakeholders as well as being thorough in conducting feasibility and sustainability studies and comparing the results of those against the aims and vision for the event.



Figure 8 Aiming for strategic fit in pre-bidding considerations (Ahonen & Backman 2021, adapted).

In Finland's case strategic fit could be very well achieved with one time hallmark events or smaller scale international events like youth championships rather than mega events like the World Cup or the Olympics. When thinking about cost-benefit considerations, our resources might not be enough to get a positive outcome from hosting such a large-scale event. It is also important to consider that in Finland equality in sport and youth sport activity development are important values in the society which calls for events that fit those themes so that the people will get behind those efforts.

## 5.2 Discussion

This research provides unique insight into the sport management field in Finland today. As no other research has been done here on the specific topic of pre-bidding in sport events this study opens discussion and starts building a foundation for future research and academic literature on the matter.

Reviewing ethics and evaluating the research is always an important part of a thesis process. As in all research, there are limitations to this study due to the approach and data used. Qualitative research cannot be generalized and so the results of this study cannot be directly applied to a case with a different geographical or socio-economic context. The research could also have been enhanced with a larger number of interviewees in general or having interviewees with more personal knowledge and experience about sport events in Finland specifically. However, the interviewees are all highly respected by the scholarly community worldwide in the sport management field and they undoubtedly have the best expertise, on issues related to sport events, that there is.

Ethically there is the possibility of biased results, since some of the interviewees are the same researchers whose works the theoretical framework is based on. In this study's case though it is completely justified to have interviewed the same experts, since this research is the first of its kind in Finland and the number of scholars focused on the topic is limited internationally as well. What reinforces the reliability of the study is that even if the interviewees were partly the ones whose works have been referenced, the interviewer was neutral. There is of course always the possibility of the interviewer's personal experiences and preconceptions affecting the interviews and therefore the results, but it was very intentional to look at things from a distance and try to stay as partial and neutral as possible when both conducting the interviews as well as analyzing the data.

The trustworthiness of this study was ensured by following the research process carefully, selecting right theoretical framework and by recording and verbatim transcribing the interview data. The credibility of interpreting the results from the interviews and ensuring the valid data-analysis was ascertained by bringing in the lead researcher in this part of the study. Consistency of this research was checked by the lead researcher and the representative of the employer, Sport Event Management Finland project manager. The overall research process was straightforward and did not consist of big challenges in terms of finding sources, getting interviews, or analyzing the data.

For future research it would be beneficial to study previous successful and failed bids in Finland to get a clear understanding of what has been done right and wrong in the past and then to compare those results with the conclusions of this study. Another possibility for future research is

conducting similar inquiries in different countries' contexts and to compare those results with this research. Especially comparing studies done in different countries of a similar size as Finland could provide very meaningful insights and further conclusions on the topic. More research in the sport management field in Finland overall needs to be focused on event bidding and pre-bidding phases to get a more complete image of the phenomenon and to formulate holistic theories around it.

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